7: Nyangweso U-4 (no date)1930 FL11 Luo FL11

THE CULT OF MUMBO IN CENTRAL AND SOUTH KAVIRONDO.

By "Nyangweso."

124 Owing to the African's habit of giving the answer he imagines to be the one required instead of the real answer to a question, it has been a little difficult to sift fact from fiction as regards the Mumbo cult. A further complication is that in this religion, as in others, there are different sects who hold their own views as to the interpretation of the teachings of the founder. I have however endeavoured, after several interviews with members of the cult, and with others in a position to give reliable information, to eliminate minor local divergencies of belief, and to give a broad outline of the main beliefs and practices of the Mumboites.

795 In 1913, there lived in the Central Kavirondo location of Alego, a man named Onyango Dunde, of the Aseje clan. One evening as he sat in his hut, a gigantic snake appeared and swallowed him up. It was so big that as it stood on end in the lake (Lake Victoria) its head reached up into the clouds. Almost immediately afterwards it vomited Onyango back again into his hut, unscathed but rather shaken. Indeed it appears that this was just the snake's method of drawing Onyango's attention to the fact that it wished to speak with him, which it proceeded at once to do. It spoke more or less as follows:—

"I am the God Mumbo whose two homes are in the Sun and in the Lake. I have chosen you to be my mouth-piece. Go out and tell all Africans—and more especially the people of Alego—that from henceforth I am their God. Those whom I chose personally, and also those who acknowledge me, will live for ever in plenty. Their crops will grow of themselves and there will be no more need to work. I will cause cattle, sheep, and goats to come up out of the lake in great numbers to those who believe in me, but all unbelievers and their families and cattle will die out.

[186] "The Christian religion is rotten (mbovu) and so is its practice of making its believers wear clothes. My followers must let their hair grow—never cutting it. Their clothes shall be the skins of goats and cattle and they must never wash. All Europeans are your enemies, but the time is shortly coming when they will all disappear from our country.

"Daily sacrifice—preferably the males—of cattle, sheep, goats, and fowls shall be made to me. More especially do I prefer black bulls. Have no fear of sacrificing these as I will cause unlimited black cattle to come to you from the Lango (Masai, Nandi, and Lumbwa).

17: Southall E-5 (1946-1947) 1952 FL11 Luo FL11

originate all the larger lineages which provide the political framework of Luo society.

My illustrations of Luo lineage structure are taken from material on one large lineage group, that of Karachuonyo. This group inhabits the present locations of Karachuonyo and Kasipul, and in 1947 had a population of 90,000. I lived here from December 1946 till March 1947 and again for the month of September 1947. On each occasion I took with me a Luo student from Makerere College as interpreter and research assistant. I went through my material with a dozen or more of the Luo students at Makerere who themselves came from a number of different locations. Clearly, from such a short period in the field, my results are not complete, but in so far as they add to the information at present available, I present them for what they are worth. The map (Fig. 5) shows all the Luo locations of South Kavirondo, those of the Karachuonyo group and of the other lineages which claim descent from the common ancestors, Jook and his wife Awuondo, being shown in heavy type.

III. THE FAMILY

The most prominent cultural features of the Luo landscape are the euphorbia hedges, at stages of growth varying from that of 3-foot saplings to that of 30-foot trees, dating each site by their planting at the time of first occupation, and throwing a thick green wall round the cluster of huts within. This residential unit is the *dala* or *pacho*, and will be referred to as the homestead. The dwelling-huts ranged in a circle round the inside of the hedge are those of married women, the chief wife's hut being at the side opposite to the entrance through the hedge, and the huts of subsequent wives arranged in alternate succession on either side of that of the chief wife.[1] The husband and head of the homestead divides his time between the huts of his wives, the chief wife's hut taking precedence,[2] having no other quarters of his own except an *abila*, a smaller hut usually in the centre of the circle, which was his only place of privacy. There is a belief that if the husband leaves the homestead to escape from the bickering of his wives he will die on re-entering it, and the *abila* provides him with a safer sanctuary. It was also a vantage point from which he could keep a watchful eye on his cattle in the nearby kraal. The homestead is the spatial correlate of the compound polygynous family and is subdivided into the households of its component elementary families. Just as *dala* or *pacho* applies both figuratively to the social group and concretely to the homestead occupied by it, so *ot* applies both to house and to the household of wife and children occupying it. The title of the head of the homestead and its family group is *nam dala* or *nam pacho*; *jadong* (elder) may be substituted for *nam*. Correspondingly, each wife is *nam ot*, signifying that she is head of the household, proprietress of its hut and all other effects, and leader of its domestic and economic activities. The word *nam* is usually translated as 'father', and is in fact the classificatory term for all agnates of the generation senior to the speaker, including the 'genitor'. But its use with reference to all married women,

[1] See Gluckman in *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, ed. Radcliffe-Brown and Forde. The Luo family has a 'house-property complex' of the Zulu type but in a less extreme form.

[2] This is often striking in ritual. The husband's most valuable possessions are also kept there. With the present changes in hut design the chief wife's hut is often of the new and more pretentious rectangular pattern, while a second wife's may also be rectangular but smaller, and the third wife's still of the traditional circular type.

20:Ominde I-5 (ca. 1948) 1952
FL11 Luo FL11

121 later studies can be based. I have also worked on the assumption that a study of one's immediate background is an essential preliminary to wider investigation.

124 In conducting these studies of social life I have followed the questioning method, and having obtained information from individuals I later discussed that information with a number of other people. I was therefore able to check mistakes arising from purely individual opinion. Altogether nineteen women and eight men were interviewed with regard to family conditions and problems of inter-family relations. I also supplemented by personal observation the information given me on the treatment and feeding of babies. When watching children at play I was sometimes obliged to keep out of view, as children normally feel shy when under the direct observation of an adult. The only group whose play I observed closely was composed of a child-nurse of about ten, my brother's son of eight months (born on August 26th, 1946), my sister's daughter of six, a son of four, and another elder son of about nine. At times I actually watched them playing, but on other occasions I had to visit their play-haunts and examine the articles they had left behind. I noticed that the locations varied very little. This small group gave me a good opportunity to study the play preferences of the two sexes.

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123 With the more mature girls I was able to engage in free discussion, making use of the traditional opportunities for conversation at marriage ceremonies. In short, my field observations were distributed throughout a range of life from infancy to maturity.

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